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FROM PETER DAMIANI
TO DANTE**

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**IDLE AND USEFULL CURIOSITY FROM
PETER DAMIANI TO DANTE**²

The twelfth century is a period of intense search in all fields of culture and religion, a period of great curiosity. But the curiosity, an ambiguous term and psychological attitude, was for centuries, since Augustin, banished as a dangerous sin. This ascetic perception of goals and methods of human knowledge, not a mere agnosticism, came to compete with a new *mundana sapientia*, an appeal to philosophical inquiry, to reception of scientific texts from Arabs and Ancients, represented by some «innovators» (Abaelard, Hermann of Carinthia, Thierry of Chartres etc.). In this article, ideas promoted by them are sequentially compared to the voices of some «retrogrades», like Peter Damiani or Bernard of Clairvaux. This comparison leads us to a better understanding of the age of «sic et non», an epoch of constant dialogue and dispute.

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Personification of curiosity. Conques, Sainte Foy.

Fragment of a frieze. First half of XIIth century

Ulysses, Alexander the Great, and Aristotle : ancient models of human curiosity?

Let us begin, as it were, from the close. The XXVI Chant of *Inferno* has a crucial position in the architecture of Dante's poem. This is expressed stylistically : intending to recount the fate, beyond the grave and on the earth, of Ulysses, the poet changes the comic, « plebeian » style of previous chants into a higher, « tragic » one (XXVI, 19-24). Frightened, as usual, to deviate himself while seeing sins and punishments of others, he tries to instruct his own intellect and poetical gift, *lo 'ngegno*, received from stars and the Allmighty, to analyse properly, under the guidance of the *virtù*, what he discovered in the fiery plain of the eighth ditch. By subduing his creativity to the voice of faith, in a kind of prayer, Dante anticipates our encounter with those whose minds deviated. This combination of virtue, knowledge, faith, poetical freedom and inner spiritual discipline, all together rested upon the divine grace, is the most important Dante's mental habit, but also the clue for understanding *his* Ulysses, this metonymy of curiosity in the time of great scholastic debates. Let him, this astute traveller, guide us to the centuries long story

of this mental attitude, a « deadly vice », if not deadly sin, for some thinkers, but a vice that probably laid the foundation of modern styles of scientific thinking.

The beginning of the famous Ulysses' talk (XXVI, 90–99), undoubtedly autoreferential in many respects, shows the ancient hero not especially as an impostor, a four-flusher, as the Middle Ages often looked at him : Dante's *frode*, fraud, is surely as much ambivalent, as every moral category in texts of theologians, poets and preachers. Ulysses is a deceiver not because of the troian horse, but because he yearned to know everything about the world and the nature of man (*a divenir del mondo esperto / E de li vizi umani e del valore*), trusting exclusively in his own, pagan, *virtù*, in his irrepressible curiosity, in a pointless, and graceless, *mundana sapientia*. His thirst of knowledge ravishes and entices, but scares as well, and does not relieve him of responsibility for his *frode*. His famous appeal to his brathers in arms (XXVI, 112–117) to follow him westward, *diretro al sol*, and to discover the uninhabited world is surely not an anthem for medieval « Columbus », even though Dante heard about Marco Polo and the expedition of two galeas, sent in May 1291 from Genoa by d'Orio and de' Vivaldi to India through the Atlantic ocean : they never came back.

Contrary to the *Odyssea*, unknown to Dante, and to its old-french and latin derivates that he could have read, Dante's Ulysses never saw again Penelope and fail into Hell, because he transgressed the Hercules' Gates, set up on the modern Gibraltar not only as the confine of the *oikoumene*, but also of the human knowledge : that was an idea inherited and christianised from the pagan antiquity. The insolent fraudulent hero, after weeks of their « mad flight », *folle volo*, dared hope to find the salvation (as represented by the mirage of the mount of Purgatory) without grace, but their sudden joy ended by an equally sudden death. In his last lines, Dante is as strikingly laconic, as impetuous was the whirlpool, that punished, with Ulysses as its personification, the idle, purely terrestrial, sinful, faithless, pagan curiosity³. And this in Dante, curious himself, admirator of Aristotle, well informed in methods and problems of cosmology of his time, promoter of experimental ways of inquiry in his *Paradiso* (II, 94-105).

At the same time, in the beginning of the XIVth century, in a school class was discussed, and then fixed by an anonymous master, a quodlibetal question "whether Aristotle is rescued": the famous philosopher, « roul of all truth » for many scholastics, even though *pessimus metaphysicus* for some of them was condemned to Hell because of his « arrogant » presumption

³ *Gagliardi D.* La condanna della *curiositas* nel pensiero cristiano // Studi tardoantichi. 1989. Vol. 8. P. 333-336. On faith and reason by Dante see: *Nardi B.* Dante e la cultura medievale. Bari : Laterza, 1990. P. 135ff. In the same book (p. 125-134) we can find an explanation of the Ulysses episode. Several points of view are discussed in comments by Giuseppe Giacomone: *Dante Alighieri.* La Divina Commedia. Inferno / a cura di G. Giacomone. Roma, 1988. P. 486-510, and by Ruedi Imbach : *Imbach R.* Dante, la philosophie et les laïcs. Initiations à la philosophie médiévale I. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1996. P. 220-245.

to know what is happiness *naturally*, without grace nor faith⁴. Aristotle : an other inquisitive mind, much less mythologized, than Ulysses, but also subject to all kinds of pseudo-doxographic speculations, from the rediscovery of his authentic and spurious works in the XIIth century up to the relative stabilization of the latin *corpus aristotelicum*. In one of the versions of his death, inherited from Antiquity, captured first by Helinand of Froidmont, then, by the middle of XIIIth century, popularized by Vincent of Beauvais, the Stagirite dies because of his curiosity : he wanted to understand the nature of the stream of Eurippus, unable to do so by seeing, he stepped into the river and was carried away and drowned⁵. The similarity with Dante's story is patent. Being an « encyclopaedist », Vincent vacillates behind his usual *alii dicunt*, he put the account next to that of Homer's death, and the whole *exemplum* served him to illustrate a classical christian adagio : *sapientia huius mundi stultitia est apud Deum*. But some first christian polemicists, like st. Justin Martyr and even st. Gregory of Nyssa spoke about a suicide, which changed completely the appreciation of this « scientific » curiosity of the Philosopher !⁶

Ulysses was not the only one ancient *vir illuster* who transgressed rules and gates : Alexander the Great, according to some prose versions of the *Historia de preliis* also crossed the Gibraltar⁷, which hyperbolically corresponded to the idea of the immensity of his empire and, let say, to his measurless character. Everyone who heard about the marvelous adventures of this exemplary ruler, knew that he conquered the world following his curiosity : he spoke with mythical people and hybrids, fought against incredible beasts, descended to Hell, scrutinized the bottom of the Red sea and flew to the sky in a « balloon » moved by griffins⁸. The texts of the *Historia de preliis*, divergent as they are, remain ambiguous about the interpretation of this « apotheosis » : according to a manuscript of the XIIIth century, Alexander, to the end of this flight (another *folle volo*), dared to look at the whole *orbis*, and the Almighty overthrew him, even though he did not die and was accepted with joy by his fellows⁹. Earlier, by 1180, in the *Alexandreis* by Walter of Châtillon, one of the best goliardic poets of his generation, Scythians,

⁴ Imbach R. Aristoteles in der Hölle. Eine anonyme *Questio* im Cod. Vat. lat. 1012 (127ra-127va) zum jenseitsschicksal des Stagiriten // Peregrina Curiositas. Eine Reise durch den *orbis antiquus*. Zu Ehren von Dirk Van Damme / Hg. A. Kessler et al. Göttingen, 1994. S. 304-310. The anonymous master, probably a franciscan, condemned to Hell not only the great philosopher, but also the king Solomon, luxurious idolater to the end of his days, but still a theologian inspired by God.

⁵ «Scribitur in libris grecorum quod Aristoteles iuxta fluvium quoddam incedens et aque revolutionem inspiciens voluit scire causam eius, sed, cum eam invenire non posset, aquam intrans voluit sensibilibus experiri, cum autem hinc inde curiose conspiceret, repente raptus a fluctibus est submersus. Sed alii ipsum aliter mortuum esse dicunt». *Vincentius Bellovacensis*. *Speculum morale*. Lib. III. Dist. II. Pars III. Duaci, 1624. Col. 999. Doxographic tradition on the death of Aristotle from Antiquity through the Middle Ages was analyzed by Wilhelm Hertz and published posthumously : *Hertz W*. *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*. Stuttgart, Berlin, 1905. S. 312ff, especially 364.

⁶ *Düring I*. Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition. Göteborg: Acta universitatis Goteburgensis, 1957. PP. 347-348.

⁷ I owe this information to my friend Maud Pérez-Simon.

⁸ Not by accident, the first illustrated version of the latin *Historia de preliis*, produced around 1260 in Southern Italy (Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Rep. II 143), was supplied by intertextual narrative scenes, *historiae* in medieval terminology, in order to emphasize these exotic, « strange » features, all to stimulate the reader's curiosity.

⁹ Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Rep. II 143. Fol. 101^r.

perfectly acquainted with political rhetoric of the XIIth century, jeer at his insatiable will of power and of knowledge :

Quorum qui reliquis fuerat maturior euo,
Intuitus regem, «cupido si corpus haberes
Par animo» dixit «mentique inmensa petenti,
Vel si quanta cupis, tantum tibi corporis esset,
Non tibi sufficeret capiendo maximus orbis,
Sed tua mundanas mensura excederet horas:
Ortum dextra manus, occasum leua teneret.
Nec contentus eo, scrutari et querere uotis
Omnibus arderes ubi se mirabile lumen
Conderet et solis auderes scandere currus
Et uaga depulso moderari lumina Phebo.
Sic quoque multa cupis que non capis. orbe subacto,
Cum genus humanum superaueris, arma cruentus
Arboribus contraque feras et saxa mouebis,
Montanasque niues scopulisque latentia monstra
Non intacta sines, sed et ipsa carentia sensu
Cogentur sentire tuos elementa furores¹⁰.

It is not unreasonable to consider that Alexander was an exemplary ruler, a *speculum* by himself, and that in all described occasions he just tried on the garb of the divine omnipotence¹¹. Around 1100, another great poet and humanist Baudry of Bourgueil, wrote a nice *ekphrasis*, a description of the bedchamber of Adèle, countess of Blois, daughter of William the Conquerer, with interesting details on the constellations on the ceiling : does it mean that the countess was enlightened and curious enough to use her chamber as a kind of intellectual observatory ? Or had this text a more precise didactic goal : to instruct her children Stephan (future king of England) and Henry (future bishop of Winchester) ? Nothing else makes sure that the real iconographic

¹⁰ *Galteri de Castellione*. Alexandreis. VIII, 374-390 / Ed. M. Colker. Padova, 1978.

http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost12/Gualterus/gua_al08.html (28.03.2012). See some interesting parallels in : *Bynum C. W. Wonder // American Historical Review*. Vol. 102. N. 1. 1997. P. 20-21.

¹¹ The interpretation of the ascension was twofold, as demonstrated in : *Settis-Frugoni Ch. Historia Alexandri elevati per grifhos ad aerem. Origine, iconografia e fortuna di un tema*. Roma, 1973. P. 121-147. In this rhetoric around natural philosophy, scholars don't always know where it is a real curiosity and where a mere echo of literary topoi: *Morpurgo P. L'armonia della natura e l'ordine dei governi (secoli XII-XIV)*. Turnhout, 2000. P. 30. See also: *Nitschke A. Naturerkenntnis und politisches Handeln im Mittelalter. Körper, Bewegung, Raum*. Stuttgart, 1967; *Stürner W. Natur und Gesellschaft im Denken des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters. Naturwissenschaftliche Kraftvorstellungen und die Motivierung politischen Handelns in Texten des 12. bis 14. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart, 1975.

program ever existed¹². *Alexandreis*, as well as the *Divine comedy*, had a political connotation, since it was written in Northern France during the campaign for a new crusade and gained popularity through its dedicatory, the archbishop of Reims. And Walter's Alexander is as charming and ambivalent, as Dante's Ulysses. The cunning king of Ithaca calls his fellows to follow the sun, *diretro al sol*, Alexander simply throws down Phoebus from his chariot, *depulso Phebo*, and though is awarded with a co-rulership of Jupiter on the Olympus. As all mortals, he *had* to die, and his death was prepared by Nature, disdained by his intrusion into her realm and thus compelled to scheme with Lucifer (X, 24-25).

Questioning the Holy Writ

What do we have to deal with, when we find favourite literary models of the central Middle Ages criticized, or even punished for their curiosity? Is it a flagellation of an indefatigable lust for power? A variation on the contempt of the world and uselessness of human heroism without profound pity, without grace? Forsooth. We should not forget, that the great XIIth century writers, populating their literary worlds by pagan divinities, transformed them into allegories and remained more (like Alan of Lille) or less (like Walter or Bernard Silvestris) christian moralists. It is more interesting for our purpose, that the denunciation of the pride, this typical « feudal » vice, entailed criticism, or at least scepticism, against what we would call not only bases of a scientific style of thinking, but of a normal, human view on the world, which presupposes an interested gaze, curiosity, capacity of wonder. Does one have the right to wonder (anything besides the mysteries of faith), to ask, to discuss, to doubt, to search? What kind of inquiring is an intellectual, useful curiosity and where lies the frontier of the idle one? The twelfth century, an age of reformation and renaissance in many respects, was surely rich in great spiritual discoveries, but also in great doubts. We should consider both of them and consider this *long century* at least with two or three generations before and two generations after it, from Peter Damian to Frederick II.

Curiosity was divided into useful and idle before the appearance of christian philosophical and moral speculation, by Cicero, Seneca, Apuleius. Christians remembered not only the Loth's wife, but also Ikarus and Phaeton, and in the time of the Fathers *curiositas* was really transformed into a vice among others¹³. The Holy Writ, like classical authorities, left a

¹² *Abrahams P.* Les œuvres poétiques de Baudri de Bourgueil (1046-1130). P., 1926. P. 222-233. *Carruthers M.* The Craft of Thought. Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200. Cambridge, 1998. P. 213-220.

¹³ *Bös G.* Curiositas. Die Rezeption eines antiken Begriffes durch christliche Autoren bis Thomas von Aquin. Paderborn, 1995. S. 30 ff. To this general terminological panorama one should add some articles: *Newhauser R.* Towards a History of Human Curiosity: A Prolegomenon to its Medieval Phase // *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte.* 1982. S. 559-575. *Peters E.* Libertas Inquirendi and the Vitium Curiositatis in Medieval Thought // *La notion de liberté au Moyen Âge. Islam, Byzance, Occident / Dir. G. Makdisi et al.* Paris, 1985. P. 89-98. *Pomyan Krz.* La culture de la curiosité // *Le temps de la réflexion.* 1982. T. III. P. 337-359.

legacy with more questions than answers, more advices and parabols than prescriptions. On one hand, there is no sens trying to elicit the day of the second coming (Mk. 13, 32), and young widows are often « idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not» (1 Tym. 5, 13). On the other hand, the author of the *Ecclesiastes*, exemplar of the divinely inspired wisdom, said : «For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this» (9,1), «Omnia haec tractavi (sometimes « temptavi ») in corde meo, ut curiose intelligerem». It is not without importance that st. Jerome translated the participle *labur* periphrastically: *ut curiose intelligerem*. The rare hebrew verb *bur* meant a diligent inquiry and a detailed explanation of it, and one of the last great translators of Antiquity tried to transmit this semantics considering probably the original sens of the latin *cura* : « care ». Curiosity remained a connotation, synonym and antonym of idleness at the same time : this paradoxicality of the Writ was not a secret since the beginning of the exegesis. No paradox if *Ecclesiastes*, the wise man, disdains all philosophizing¹⁴, Solomon, the wise king, dies unrepentant idolater (3 King 11, 43), and st. Paul, a « philosopher » among apostles, is bitterly criticized by Festus, in the *Acts* : « Paul, thou art beside thy selfe, much learning doeth make thee mad » (26, 24).

The burden was surely the well known passage from one of st. John's letters : « Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world » (1 John 2, 15-16). St. Augustin developped the juxtaposition *superbia – curiositas – concupiscentia carnis* in his *Confessions*, where the lust of the eyes is in origin of futile and avid curiosity disguised in the mantel of science (10, 34, 54-55)¹⁵. Like other Fathers, he was not an agnostic, but he spurned any kind of knowledge not aiming God. The medieval epistemological asceticism was founded on the same discredit upon bodily senses, even upon the vision, since the supreme subject of all true knowledge was *invisible*. That explains why st. Gregory the Great, formed monastically, opposed humility to curiosity, even though there is no special mention of this vice in st. Benedict's *Rule*.

From Peter Damiani to William of Conches : ascets and encyclopaedists

But let us come closer the age we are now interested in. Peter Damiani is one of the most talented critics of liberal arts and curiosity the Middle Ages ever produced. By 1060 he adressed to the young hermit Aripandus a short treatise « Holy simplicity, as opposed to the haughty

¹⁴ For more detail on curiosity and true wisdom in *Ecclesiastes* as seen by some commentators see : *Dahan G. L'Écclésiaste contre Aristote ? Les commentaires de Eccl 1, 13 et 17, 18 aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles // Itinéraires de la raison. Études de philosophie médiévale offertes à Maria Cândida Pacheco / Dir. J.F. Meirinhos. Louvain-la-Neuve, 2005. P. 205-233, especially p. 227-229.*

¹⁵ Cf.: Augustinus. *De vera religione*. Cap. 38.

science », *De sancta simplicitate scientiae inflanti anteponenda*, where he exhorts his spiritual fellow to abandon the dangerous *scientia* for the salutary *sapientia*¹⁶. Liberal arts are not *studia*, but *stultitia*, the thirst for knowledge insults the highest gift of heaven, love : «Cum enim ingratum esse Deo non parvi sit criminis, formidolose tibi cavendum est ne inde contra Deum prosilias in tyrannidem, unde gratiarum illi debueras actionem, et dum scientiam que inflat immoderatus flagitas, caritatem que edificat insipienter offendas»¹⁷.

We shall not hasten to call his position obscurantist. All monks remembered the base of Peter's analysis : « Knowledge puffeth up: but Charitie edifieth » (1 Cor. 8, 1). For st. Anselm of Canterbury, one generation younger, and opening, with his oeuvre, the next century, the « true science », *scientia veritatis*, is nothing without love, the *affectus caritatis*: « Love should be loved more than science »¹⁸. Anselm is probably unique in his harmony between faith and reason, between love as personal meditative experience and philosophical speculation¹⁹. Peter Damiani does not set on the right path a layman, but a monk, who probably left the world to early and felt upset that he did not have the time to study the liberal arts, in which the critic, once pupil at the cathedral school of Parma, was not to be excelled. One shall remember a beautiful account of marvels of the earth, *mirabilia*, in his influential « Divine omnipotence », *De omnipotentia divina* (ch. XI) : it was not written by someone lacking of curiosity. But every marvel, curious as it was, served him to demonstrate his main subject and to sing the glory of the Almighty, he interpreted an octopus as a « mystery of salutary allegory »²⁰. Peter Damiani also forestalled the XIIth century in his use of a highly decorated and balanced style, in political epistles and in ascetic prose and poetry : like several ascets, he skillfully blended the sake of God with a love for letters, and, lashing the liberal arts as a root of idleness, he was flagellating himself, young, talented, curious student, *stylus altus* served him as a weapon in a battle against his own curious intellectual self²¹.

The novelty of the XIIth century consists in the fact that the symbolical, not « physical » world-view lost its exclusive power over minds : new forms of knowledge appeared around 1100, a *mundana sapientia*, which were literary unimaginable two generations earlier²². Thierry of Chartres, a brilliant and famous master, is no more interested in allegorical exegesis of the

¹⁶ On the motive of the holy simplicity, introduced by st. Jerome (Ep. 53, 3), see.: *Lehmann P.* Die heilige Einfalt // Historisches Jahrbuch. Bd. 58. 1938. S. 305-316. *Leclercq J.* L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu. Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen Âge. P., 1990 (1957). P. 194-195. *Curtius E. R.* Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter. Bern, München, 1948. S. 93-95, 410-415.

¹⁷ *Petrus Damiani.* De sancta simplicitate scientiae inflanti anteponenda. Cap. 4. Patrologia latina. Vol. 145. Col. 698C. *Caritas*, as opposed to knowledge by st. Paul (1 Cor. 8), is the foundation of Damiani's theology.

¹⁸ «Plus enim debet amari caritas quam scientia». Epistola 85. Anselmi Cantabrigiensis. Opera. Vol. III / Ed. F. S. Schmidt. Edinburgh, 1946. P. 210-211.

¹⁹ *Leclercq J., S. B.* L'humanisme des moines au moyen âge // Studi medievali. Vol. X/1. 1969. P. 102-103.

²⁰ *Petrus Damiani.* De bono religiosi status et variarum animantium tropologia. Cap. 8 // Patrologia latina. Vol. 145. Col. 771D.

²¹ *Leclercq J.* L'amour... P. 240-241. *Cantin P.* Les sciences séculières et la foi. Les deux voies de la science au jugement de S. Pierre Damien (1007-1072). Spoleto, 1975. P. 535 ss. For a detailed analysis of the Aripandus episode see p. 50-59.

²² *Gregory T.* Mundana sapientia. Forme di sapere nella cultura medievale. Roma, 1992. P. 84ss.

Bible, extensively elaborated by the Fathers, he says, but in mechanics of the Creation : this mechanics is, for him, the *historical*, i.e. *true* sens of the Writ²³. His *Hexaemeron*, in certain respect, is surely a forerunner of the new physics, but we have to remember that, after the innovative explanation of the biblical cosmogony in the first part of his unfinished treatise, he steps on the most thorny path of his time : he proposes a rational, arithmetical explication of the Holy Trinity, the dogma that seemed beyond the reason by definition. His contemporary chartrain fellow William of Conches, in his youthfully audacious *Philosophia*, as well as in a more mature and ponderated *Dragmaticon* declared against any punctiliousness in the exegesis of the Writ, claimed *in omnibus rationem esse querendam*²⁴, but still : his *natura* was the main aid of God, « a force inherent in things, creating similar from similar », a « mystery of the divine providence », according to a felicitous expression of the Père Chenu²⁵.

Neither Abaelard, toledan translators, nor « chartrains » never dreamed of an autonomous « philosophy », separated from theology, but even a supposition that one can understand what he normally should *just* believe seemed to others an inexcusable aberration. Tullio Gregory was right : William of Conches acknowledged some mistakes, found in his *Philosophia* by William of Saint Thierry, gave up speaking about the « world's soul », repented of his « bad » understanding of the biblical account of the creation of Eve, but remained true to him self, while preferring the « nude verity » to an « adorned lie »²⁶. Thierry of Chartres finished his life in the silence of a cistercian abbey and, following the famous principle of the Gospels (Mt. 23, 8) repudiated the honourable name of master²⁷. Abaelard, in the last years of his life, was reconciled with Rome and even with Bernard of Clairvaux by no other than Peter the Venerable, the enlightened abbot of Cluny. But we have to remember, reading the famous abbot's letter of consolation to Eloise after her husband's death, one of the most beautiful epitaphs of that century, that the price of this reconciliation was a humble monastic silence. This silence, under the subtle pen of Abaelard's last protector, became a model : the famous ultra-

²³ *Theodoricus Carnotensis*. Tractatus de sex dierum operibus. Cap. 1 // Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and his School / Ed. N. Häring. Toronto, 1971. P. 555.

²⁴ «Non enim ad litteram credendum est Deum excostasse primum hominem». «Nos autem dicimus in omnibus rationem esse querendam, si potest inveniri». *Guillelmus de Conchis*. *Philosophia*. I, XIII, 43-45 / Ed. G. Maurach. Pretoria, 1980. P. 38-40. The creation (or birth?) of Eve from the rib of Adam (*excostasse*), as recently demonstrated, was a real puzzle for intellectuals and iconographers of later Middle Ages: *Baschet J.* L'iconographie médiévale. Paris, 2008. P. 298-341. Apparently most simple truths, far from beings « dogmas », concealed ambiguities and unexpected consequences in intellectual, religious and social life.

²⁵ *Guillelmus de Conchis*. *Dragmaticon philosophiae*. I, 7, 3 / Ed. I. Ronca. Turnhout, 1997. P. 30. *Chenu M.-D., O. P.* La théologie au douzième siècle. P., 1966. P. 179.

²⁶ «Quamvis multos ornatum verborum quaerere, paucos veritatem scire cognoscamus, nihil de multitudine, sed de paucorum probitate gloriantes, soli veritati insudabimus: maluimus enim promittere nudam veritatem quam palliatam falsitatem». *Guillelmus de Conchis*. *Philosophia*. II. Prologus / Ed. cit. P. 41. The *Dragmaticon philosophiae*, a more extensive, later exposition of William's platonizing cosmology begins with a quite frank self-fustigating apology: «Cum in eodem (sc. *Libro Philosophiae*) de creatione primi hominis loqueremur, diximus Deum non ex Adam vel ex costa feminam fecisse, sed ex limo qui coniunctus illi fuerat, ex quo viri corpus plasmaverat: ideoque translative esse dictum, quod ex costa Adae facta sit femina: hoc iterum damnandum, damnandumque iudicamus, sanctae et divinae scripturae consentientes, que ait quod immisso sopore in Adam, tulit Deus unam costam de costis eius: ex qua materialiter corpus mulieris plasmavit». *Dragmaticon*. I, 1, 10 / Ed. cit. P. 8-9. *Gregory T.* *Anima mundi*. La filosofia di Guglielmo di Conches e la scuola di Chartres. Firenze, [1955]. P. 244-246.

²⁷ *Vernet A.* Une épithape de Thierry de Chartres // *Recueil de travaux offert à Clovis Brunel*. P., 1955. P. 663.

curious, arrogant *rhinoceros indomitus*, a former intellectual heretic, Eloise's illegitimate lover, then husband, then her self-made spiritual father turned into a *philosophus Christi* in the precincts of the great burgundian monastery²⁸. Masterfully, and posthumously, modelled humility of Abaelard is in striking contrast to the character of the protagonist of the *Historia calamitatum*. A true christian philosophy, a real love for wisdom is in prayer, fast and silence, rather than in superfluous vain loquacity and passion for idle discussions about holy dogmas on every crossroads, that angered the crowd of his adversaries at Soissons and Sens²⁹.

The abbot of Cluny was not a censor, not a « silent master » and probably even not a « silencer » (Peter Godman), his *silentium* did not disclaim the liberal arts : it is difficult to suspect the initiator of the latin in a lack of curiosity³⁰. Neither him, nor Hugh of Saint-Victor and other intellectuals aimed the sarcasm of William of Conches citing Juvenal (Sat. II, 15) :

Rarus sermo illis et magna libido tacendi.

He aimed Bernard and William of Saint Thierry, that means those who, in William of Conches' mind, wasted their eloquence in order to make others keep silent³¹.

He was partly right. There were many, especially a large circle of influential cistercians who saw a great danger for faith in the excessive curiosity. They were not « inquisitors », but surely considered them selves guardians. An anonymous sicilian translator of the Ptolemy's *Almagest*, a clever, talented William's contemporary, did not spare bitter words in a passionate philippic against such guardians: «Neque enim questus spe motus aut gloria istum potui laborem substinere, cum liquido constet spei locum artifice non relinquere, ubi ars ludibrio et dedecori est. Neque enim artificem mirari potest qui artem non miratur. Sensisti vero et tu nonnullos hiis in temporibus cause quam ignorant iudices audacissimos, qui, ne minus scientes videantur, quecunque nesciunt inutilia predicant aut profana. Iuxta quod Arabes dicunt: Nullus maior artis inimicus quam qui eius expertus est. Eoque pertinacius criminandis artibus instant quo ab earum laude impericie probrum certius sibi conspiciunt imminere. Eos omitto qui honestatis zelo honesta quoque studia persecuntur. Quos pie peccare recte dixerim dum nocivam curarum putredinem recidere contententes, a sanarum altrice curarum philosophia manum minime continent indiscretam, sed et eam ipsius partem graviori criminatione persecuntur que ingeniis exquisitia clarissimis et exulta quo defecior ac purior est, eo sapientie vocabulo dignior, eo gratiori quadam compede speculationis iocundissime animos hominum continent alligatos.

²⁸ Letters of Peter the Venerable. Ep. 115 / Ed. G. Constable. Cambridge, Mass., 1967. P. 306-307. For an interesting analysis of this letter in context of the *consolation* genre see : Von Moos P. Consolatio. Studien zur mittellateinischen Trostliteratur über den Tod und zum Problem der christlichen Trauer. Bd. I. München, 1971. SS. 277-278.

²⁹ The Bernard's letter 337, addressed to Innocent II, is an eloquent exemple among others.

³⁰ Kritzeck J. Peter the Venerable and Islam. Princeton, 1964. P. 97 ff.

³¹ *Guillelmus de Conchis*. Philosophia. I. XIII. 45 / Ed. cit. P. 40.

Horum siquidem error sive coloratus honesto malicioso quoque predictorum testimonio fretus, apud imperitos, quorum maxima est multitudo³², in bonarum neglectum arcium efficacissime peroravit, ut iam numerorum quidem mensurarumque scientia omnino superflua et inutilis, astrorum vero studium ydolatRIA estimetur». And a bit later: «Unde et ab ordine docendi et discendi theologiam metaphisicam nominabat. Verum nostri nimirum hoc quasi quodam molimine giganteo minime indigent sine omni creaturarum adminiculo radiis summe lucis oculos infigere potentissimi atque summe secreta veritatis efficaciter penetrare, vix rudimentis a puerilibus celum involant terrasque habitare dedignantur, super nubes eorum conversatio³³, atque in ipso summe sinu sapientie sese requiescere gloriantur, mundanam desipiunt sapientiam, eique vacantium deliramenta subsannant»³⁴.

I give this long quotation, because this beautiful text not only opened one of the greatest achievements of XIIth century scientific movement, but it also reflects, with irony and bitterness, the vivid, and sometimes dramatic, polemics on the nature and aims of knowledge, on faith and reason, on didactics, observation and meditation, on pride and humility³⁵. When we read this anonymous hellenist, as well as his contemporary arabists, Peter Alfonsi, Hermann of Carinthia, Adelard of Bath and, one generation later, Gerard of Cremona³⁶, we realize that the intellectual society was split up into two apparently irreconcilable, identically influential models of knowledge, one encyclopaedic, represented by them, the other – ascetic. The first one was not at all extraneous to the monastic spirituality, if we remember some passages from the *Didascalicon*³⁷, but let us now hear the second.

³² Cf. : «Stultorum infinitus est numerus» (Eccl. 1, 15).

³³ Cf.: Phil. 3, 20.

³⁴ For the whole text of the prolog see : *Haskins Ch. Studies in the History of Medieval Science*. Cambridge, Mass., 1924. P. 191-193. Its attribution to Hermann of Carinthia has been proposed by Richard Lemay, with no relevant arguments : *Lemay R. De la Scolastique à l'Histoire par le truchement de la Philologie: Itinéraire d'un Médiéviste entre Europe et Islam // La diffusion delle scienze islamiche nel Medio Evo europeo*. R., 1987. P. 428 ss. See for instance : *Burnett Ch. Hermann of Carinthia // A History of Twelfth-Century Philosophy / Ed. P. Dronke*. Cambridge, 1988. P. 386-404.

³⁵ One could compare these *pii peccatores* to the *Cornificiani* of John of Salisbury, with their *sartago loquendi*, as an other, opposite, side of *libido tacendi* : «Inde ergo haec sartago loquendi in qua senex insulsus exultat, insultans his qui artium venerantur auctores, eo quod nihil utilitatis in his reperit, cum se eis dare operam simularet». Johannes Saresberiensis. *Metalogicon*. I, 3, 80 / Ed. *J. B. Hall, K. S. B. Keats-Rohan*. Turnhout, 1991. P. 17. On the part of *Metalogicon* in the polemics of the middle XIIth century see: *Gregory T. Anima mundi...* P. 256-262.

³⁶ As related by one of his temporary « students », *socii*, Daniel of Morley, who happened to come to Toledo around 1175 and retells a discussion about the status of astrology with master Gerard (*Philosophia* II, XIV), prepared by a philippic against the 'retrogrades' (*Philosophia*. II, X). *Maurach G. Daniel von Morley, «Philosophia» // Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch*. Bd. 14. 1979. S. 204-255. For a general orientation in contemporary views on astrology as a catalyst of scientific progress in XIIth century : *Boudet J.-P. Entre science et nigromance. Astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident médiéval (XII^e-XV^e siècle)*. P., 2006. P. 35ff.

³⁷ «Sicut in virtutibus, ita in scientiis quidam gradus sunt. Sed dicis: 'multa invenio in historiis, quae nullius videntur esse utilitatis, quare in huiusmodi occupabor?' bene dicis. Multa siquidem sunt in scripturis, quae in se considerata nihil expetendum habere videntur, quae tamen si aliis quibus cohaerent comparaveris, et in toto suo trutinare coeperis, necessaria pariter et competentia esse videbis. Alia propter se scienda sunt, alia autem, quamvis propter se non videantur nostro labore digna, quia tamen sine ipsis illa enucleate sciri non possunt, nullatenus debent negligenter praeteriri. Omnia discere, videbis postea nihil esse superfluum. Coartata scientia jucunda non est. *Hugo de Sancto Victore. Didascalicon. De studio legendi*. VI, 3 / Ed. *Ch. Buttimer*. Washington, 1939. P. 115. See also : *Giraud C. L'école de Saint-Victor dans la première moitié du XII^e siècle, entre école monastique et école cathédrale // École de Saint-Victor. Influence et rayonnement du Moyen Âge à l'époque moderne / Dir. D. Poirel*. Turnhout., 2010. P. 101ff.

The first step on a ladder of vices. St. Bernard of Clairvaux's analysis

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, after Peter Damiani, was surely the best, and probably the last, master, of high monastic literary style³⁸. He provided the most elaborated and original elucidation of the idle curiosity, that gains sense as a reaction to the methods of teaching and preaching he stamped « stupidology », *stultologia*³⁹. I don't mean his commitment to the self-knowledge as opposed to the knowledge of the world around : he did not invent this adagio⁴⁰, but his very passionate, almost juvenile, but influential, « Degrees of humility and pride », *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, written in the very beginning of his monastic and preaching road, 1122-1125, at the request of Godefroy of Roche-Vanneau, his friend from Citeaux, founder of the famous and still existing abbey of Fontenay in Burgundy, then bishop of Langres.

In its structure, the treatise is divided in two « ladders », the one leading the soul to self-consciousness, love and the knowledge of the Truth⁴¹, the other, its opposite, leading evidently to the fall. This spiritual exercise seems to be the description of a mental scheme, of a diagram, based on a traditional christian pattern, from the ladder that appeared to Jacob to the greek « Ladder » of st. John the Climax, translated into Latin in XIth century. The curiosity, in Bernard, is a voluntary renunciation to self-knowledge, a perilous disease of the soul, the first, and hardest of twelve steps, on the ladder of pride. Idly curious, forgetful soul shall be driven out « to graze kids », says Bernard, who was probably already thinking to his impressive commentaries to the *Canticles*⁴².

The curiosity, all its symptoms, diagnostics and anamnesis, receives in Bernard's treatise the same minute account as the rest of human vices, twelve witty satires on unworthy monks⁴³. Helped by vision and other senses, it « hangs around where it is not concerned with » (*Curiositas cum oculis ceterisque sensibus vagatur in ea quae ad se non attinent*) : this definition borrowed to Cicero by Fathers is extraordinary enlarged by Bernard. To this « hanging around » is opposed, in the second ladder, the first step of virtues : humility of the heart, expressed by

³⁸ *Bourgain P.* Le tournant littéraire du milieu du XII^e siècle // Le XII^e siècle. Mutations et renouveau en France dans la première moitié du XII^e siècle / Dir. *Fr. Gasparri*. P., 1994. P. 304.

³⁹ As listed among other aberrations of Peter Abaelard in a letter to Innocent II after the council of Sens (1141, according to Chr. Mews's chronology, Ep. 190). *S. Bernardus*. Opera / Ed. *J. Leclercq et alii*. Vol. 8. R., 1977. P. 17-40. Peter Godman thoroughly analysed stylistic subtleties of these polemic Bernard's writings : *Godman P.* The Silent Masters. Latin Literature and its Censors in the High Middle Ages. Princeton, 2000. P. 61-106.

⁴⁰ *Noveris licet omnia mysteria, noveris lata terrae, alta caeli, profunda maris, si te nescieris, eris similis aedificanti sine fundamento ruinam, non structuram faciens*. *Sanctus Bernardus*. De consideratione. II, III, 6. *Sanctus Bernardus*. Opera omnia / Ed. *J. Mabillon*. Vol. I. Paris, 1854. Col. 745. See for details : *Stock B.* After Augustine. The Meditative Reader and the Text. Philadelphia, 2001. P. 101-114. About st. Bernard's use of the Delphic *Nosce te ipsum* see: *Courcelle P.* Connais-toi toi-même de Socrate à Saint Bernard. P., 1974. P. 258 ss.

⁴¹ Humility is considered as the right way of self-knowledge : «Humilitatis vero talis potest esse definitio : humilitas est virtus qua homo verissima sui cognitione sibi ipse vilescit». *Sanctus Bernardus*. De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae // *Id.* Opera / Ed. *J. Leclercq, H.-M. Rochais*. Vol. 3. Roma, 1963. P. 17.

⁴² «Animae morbus deprehenditur, dum a sui circumspeditione torpescit incuria sui, curiosam in alios facit. Quia enim seipsam ignorat, foras mittitur tu haedos pascat (Cant. 1, 7)... In his vero pascendis se occupat curiosus, dum scire non curat qualem se reliquerit intus. Et vere si te vigilanter, homo, attendas, mirum est si ad aliud unquam intendas». *Ibid.* X, 28. P. 38.

⁴³ *Leclercq J.* Recueil d'études sur saint Bernard et ses écrits. Vol. 5. R., 1992. P. 321. I quote but some of ninety seven occurrences of *curiositas*, numbered by Dom Leclercq (*ibid.* P. 319).

walk, posture, a downwards look, briefly, in an image of monk fixed since the *Rule of st. Benedict*. A psychologically anormal monk can be seen from far, says Bernard, with an ironic condescension : this fidget pricks up his ears, uneasily stares around, shakes his head. As useless was the *inutilis inquisitionis curiositas* of those who asked about the date of the Last Judgement (Mk. 13, 32), so blasphemous is one gazing into this sky, he, who sinned against the sky (i.e. like every son of Adam). There is nothing common, for him as for st. Augustine, between this unpious curiosity and « novelty » of Abaelard and other « dialecticians », and the good inquisitiveness, the contemplation of the Word, the care (*cura*) that a pastor takes for his ewe, the « happy curiosity », *felix curiositas*, of the angels⁴⁴.

In all popular books on the « dark » Middle Ages we find the famous allusion (never an exact quotation) to the first *vita* of Bernard, begun by his friend and admirer William of Saint Thierry : according to it, the saint was riding a donkey along the lake of Lausanne (i.e. Léman) and, in the evening, sitting around a fire with his fellows, said that he did not notice any lake⁴⁵. A « normal » modern reader will probably lough at such a lack of curiosity, a more « open-minded » medievalist will surely accept that not *all* medieval men were so « uncurious » and « fanatics of faith »⁴⁶. Both are wrong. First, everyone who is accustomed with the particular, suddenly changeable climat of the foggy lake, clamped between the Alps, knows that it really can be completely closed to view. In the second, more important, place, the author of the *vita* was not creating a « portrait », but a model, inspired by Bernard's individual spiritual experience, by his writings, by the memories of his fellows and, last but not least, by his own understanding of *what* and *how* the famous abbot *should have thought or spoken* about. William was reconstructing, and writing down, his *mens*. It is not fortuitous that this short account of his travel to Chartreuse, all participants, including the prior of the famous abbey, were impressed (*mirati sunt*) by the self-concentration of the saint, who demonstrated an astonishing, nearly supernatural self-control, a *sensuum custodia* (anounced in the title of the chapter). We probably

⁴⁴ In some general works on medieval mentality and culture one can find an illustration from some manuscripts, produced in the XIth century (e.g. Cod. Sangallensis 18, fol. 43^r), of medieval « precursors of Galileo », a monk looking through a tube directed to a vacuum, inscribed in a circle, divided into twelve (zodiacal) segments : it is not an « astronomer », but Pacific of Verona, who invented the *horologium nocturnum*, useful for fixing the hour of *vigiliae* : « Spera celi quater senis horis dum revolvitur, / Omnes stelle fixe celi que cum ea ambiunt / Circa axem breviores circulos efficiunt. / Illa igitur que polo apparet vicinior / Inter omnes tamen ei splendor est precipuus, / Ipsa noctium horarum computatrix dicitur. ... Ante axem si quis volvens curiosus steterit, / Equinoctium vernale a sinistra noverit, / Cernere ad dextram ui autumpnale poterit ». We are invited to rotate the tube, not for the sake of curiosity, but « with all care » : *curiosus steterit*. It is a save, salutary contemplation of the spheres, helping the phisically hard nocturne prayers. And Pacific was not an ordinary monk at all : his epitaph praises him as a carver, restorer of churches, caster, but also scribe and commentator of the both Testaments. This combination of talents in liberal and mechanical arts was but rare ! See for more details : *Hamburger J. Idol Curiosity // Curiositas. Welterfahrung und ästhetische Neugierde in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit / Hg. Kl. Krüger. Göttingen, 2002. S. 42-47.*

⁴⁵ « Quod verbum saepe dictus Prior audiens, in eo potissimum mirabatur, quod sic ille Dei famulus foris oculos circumcidisset, intus animum occupasset, ut quod ipse primo offenderat visu, hoc ille tanti itineris spatio non vidisset. Juxta lacum etiam Lausanensem totius diei itinere pergens, penitus eum non vidit, aut se videre non vidit. Cum enim vespere facto de eodem lacu socii colloquerentur, interrogabat eos, ubi ille lacus esset: et mirati sunt universi». Sancti Bernardi vita prima. III, II, 4. Patrologia latina. Vol. 185. Col. 305-306.

⁴⁶ *Gurevich A. Ya. Categori srednevekovoï kul'tury. Moskva, 1984. P. 74.*

will never know what Bernard *really* felt and saw on the river of the lake, worshiped today for its natural beauty and closeness to skiing resorts.

We just saw that Bernard used the word *curiositas* in different, even contradictory manners : in this literary game on senses he was, in his century, just a master among others⁴⁷. But we do have to remember, that this game was a profound one, it was an architecture of minds.

The lust of eyes, not the general *luxuria* is, for Bernard, the root of the Fall, so the eyes, with the whole body shall be oppressed by a fast : « If other members sinned, why sharn't they fast ? Shall the eye fast, since it robbed the soul, shall the ear, the tongue, the hand, and shall the soul it self fast. Shall the eye fast of seeing curious things and all bagatelles, in order that one who, in a bad way, freely loafed in sin, shall, in a good way, humiliate him self by penitence »⁴⁸. Curious are not God's heirs, but Dina's and Eve's (one is tempted to compare this Bernard's image to the contemporary famous, and enigmatic, Eve, in relief, attributed to the master Gislebertus, now in the Musée Rohan, in Autun), and through Eve, to Satan. Bernard rhetorically asks to Dina, daughter of Jacob and Lia : « What are you gazing for ? What's the point ? Only curiosity ». And he goes on commenting, in his own, untranslatable, way : *otiosa curiositas vel curiosa otiositas* (De grad. hum. X, 29). The idleness is *syntactically* inseparable from the curiosity, inspite of any logic which would juxtapose any inactivity, at least intellectual, with the lack of curiosity. This hendiadic juxtaposition can surely be compared to another famous, influential and much commented, bernardian hendiadis, *mira quaedam deformis formositas ac formosa deformitas*, by which he reacted to the « curious » exuberances of romanesque plastic, as exemplified by the decorum of the Odo's basilica, known as « Cluny III »⁴⁹. Cistercians did not like any excesses, any *superfluum*, which, for them, derived from the sensitive part of human nature, even if this sensuality was sublimized and spiritualized, like it was in the romanesque sculpture⁵⁰. Let us remember that the abbey church of Fontenay, still well preserved, constructed under direct influence of the mother abbey of Clairvaux, the floor is sandly, not tiled, the only

⁴⁷ Dronke P. Secolo XII // Letteratura medievale (Secoli VI-XV). Un manuale / A cura di Cl. Leonardi. Firenze, 2003. P. 236, 255-256.

⁴⁸ «Si vero peccaverunt et membra cetera, cur non ieiunet et ipsa ? Ieiunet igitur oculus qui depraedatus est animam, ieiunet auris, ieiunet lingua, ieiunet manus, ieiunet etiam anima ipsa. Ieiunet oculus a curiosis aspectibus et omni petulantia (шалости) ut bene humiliatus coerceatur in paenitentia qui male liber vagabatur in culpa». *Sanctus Bernardus*. In Quadragesimam sermo 3. Opera / Ed. J. Leclercq, Ch. Talbot. Vol. 4. R., 1966. P. 367.

⁴⁹ *Sanctus Bernardus*. Apologia ad Guillelmum. XII, 29. For an exhaustive comment and a critical edition see : Rudolph C. Things of Greater Importance. Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art. Philadelphia, 1991. P. 282: «Ceterum in claustris, coram legentibus fratribus, quid facit illa ridicula monstruositas, mira quaedam deformis formositas ac formosa deformitas ? Quid ibi immundae simiae ? Quid feri leones ? Quid monstruosi centauri ? Quid semihomines ? Quid maculosae tigrides ? Quid milites pugnantes ? Quid venatores tubicinantés ? Videas sub uno capite multa corpora, et rursus in uno corpore capita multa. Cernitur hinc in quadrupede cauda serpentis, illinc in pisce caput quadrupedis. Ibi bestia praefert equum, capram trahens retro dimidiam ; hic cornutum animal equum gestat posterius. Tam multa denique, tamque mira diversarum formarum apparet ubique varietas, ut magis legere libeat in marmoribus, quam in codicibus, totumque diem occupare singula ista mirando, quam in lege Dei meditando. Proh Deo ! si non pudet ineptiarum, cur vel non piget expensarum ?»

⁵⁰ Schapiro M. On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art // *Id.* Romanesque Art. N. Y., 1977 [1947]. P. 6ff. An other english cistercian, to the end of the XIIth century, criticized contemporary christian art in the same, even if not so elegant and ingenious, form: James M. R. Pictor in carmine // *Archaeologia*. Vol. 94. 1951. P. 141--166.

religious image was probably a crucifixion on the altar, and even a metaphorical « reading » of the three window openings in the lower part of the apse as a « Trinity » is but an abstraction, and probably modern.

Bernard and his followers were ascetic in all except word. In order to condemn curiosity, as well as in his battle against the « unruly horn-nose », Peter Abaelard, he did not spare any rhetorical methods. Let us try to realize the importance of quite untranslatable alliterations of *n*, *s*, *t* in the following phrase : *Nisi enim mens minus se curiose servaret, tua curiositas tempus vacuum non haberet* (« If your soul have taken a better care of it self, there would have been no free time for curiosity », *De grad. hum. X*, 30). Literary historians even stated that we are dealing with an apex of medieval classicism (Winkler), with an almost manierist « surplus in artistry » (*Übermass an Kunst*)⁵¹. Perhaps. I don't feel competent to judge the degree of Bernard's artistry, but I am sure enough, that not an abstract « dogma », not a « catechism » combined sins and vices and worked out a moral codex of the age, but syntax, allusions and consonances in words and senses. « The Serpent increases our troubles, while exciting our gluttony, sharpens the curiosity, while suggesting cupidity » (*auget (serpens) curam, dum incitat gulam, acuit curiositatem dum suggerit cupiditatem. De grad. hum. X*, 30). There is nothing particularly new in the sequence of vices, but the use of *homoioteleuta* is, for Bernard, an argument in it self, borrowed to Seneca, the largely favorite pagan moralist for the whole Middle Ages, but Bernard's use of tropes is evidently more dense.

As I said, the chapter on curiosity strikingly exceeds all others, it is a kind of digression. Now, let us imagine, that within this « digression » Bernard manages to squeeze in another « essai », a *disputatiuncula*, on the fall of Lucifer (*De grad. hum. X*, 35). Its little size and structural subordination to the whole of the chapter shall not mislead us : Bernard tries to resolve a « little » question of the origin of the evil in the world. The root of betrayal committed by the best of angels was his curiosity : « Where does your curiosity lead you, wretched, so that you, with a singular arrogance, don't hesitate to make scandal to subjects and outrage to the King ? ... I'm rather curious to inquire, oh curious, the intention of your curiosity »⁵². Burned with curiosity, our theologically thinking psychologist, this time using a polyptot (several parts of speech with the same root), finds the answer : the best of angels wanted to know the extent of the divine patience, but did not preview consequences, he overestimated the divine goodness, was blinded by a mirage of omnipotence and by his curiosity. And this, an indefinite time before Eve ! This *primordial* curiosity is the sin of sins, a sin born, as it were, before time, but still deviating each of us from the right way. The conclusion of the *essai* is short : Lucifer fell from

⁵¹ *Bös G. Op. cit. S. 159.*

⁵² «*Quo te tua, miser, curiositas ducit, ut praesumptione singulari non dubites civibus scandalum, iniuriam facere Regi ? ... Velim tamen curiosius, o curiose, intentionem tuae curiositatis inquirere.*» *De grad. hum. X*, 36.

truth because he curiously looked at something he, then, illegitimately desired and arrogantly aspired⁵³. With this thoroughly constructed sequence (*spectavit curiose – affectavit illicite – speravit praesumptuose*) Bernard returns to what was already clear to st. Augustin : the lust of eyes entails the lust of heart.

* * *

We could longer enjoy Bernard's figures of style and thought that would lead us to call him a « retrograde », but shall we not hasten in giving labels. Was he someone who did not see the world around him for the sake of « purely » spiritual values ? Or was he someone who was looking for spiritual values in every minuscule detail of the creation : « What a reverence, fear, and humility shall feel a fearful frog when it suddenly emerges from its bog and crawls forward ! »⁵⁴ A modern zoologist will probably give other explanations while seeing a frog's head appearing on the surface of a dead-water and its lingering, calm « hesitation » (fear of a heron ? necessity of keeping the low body's temperature ? sake of humidity ?). William of Conches, a « phisicist », if compared to his contemporary cistercian, looked at frogs in a great chain of being, as it were, among other atmospheric phenomena, because tadpoles seemed to spring up instantaneously from puddles. Do we really have the right to ask who was right ? Or more curious ?

One hundred years after, an extremely investigative mind, emperor Frederick II, *vir inquisitor et sapientie amator*, as he proudly calls himself in the prolog to his treatise *On the art of falconry*⁵⁵, tried, like William, to look for the « nude truth », to « demonstrate things as they are », *manifestare ea que sunt sicut sunt*. This was, as we now know, part of a great-scale cultural project⁵⁶. His younger contemporary, a friar chronicler Salimbene de Adam, probably with many of his fellows, clerics and laics, condemned it as a whole : his perfidious « experiments » on living men, his *superstitiones et curiositates et maledictiones et incredulitates et perversitates et abusiones* led him, and, worse, also his fellows, « epicureanism », i.e. disbelief⁵⁷. Salimbene was fond of this exemplary ruler (despite his vices

⁵³ «Totius disputatiunculae haec summa sit : quod per curiositatem a veritate ceciderit, quia prius spectavit curiose quod affectavit illicite, speravit praesumptuose». De grad. hum. X, 38.

⁵⁴ *Bernardus Claraevallensis*. Sermones de diversis. Sermo XXV, 7: Quanta ergo cum reverentia, quanto timore, quanta illuc humilitate accedere debet a palude sua procedens et repens ranuncula vilis? // Sancti Bernardi. Opera / Ed. J. Leclercq. Vol. VI/1. P. 192-193.

⁵⁵ *Fridericus II*. De arte venandi cum avibus / Ed. A. Willemsen. Leipzig, 1942. T. I. S. 2.

⁵⁶ There is an avalanche of serious works on the subject, from Haskins to Burnett and others. I will try to give a complete account in my forthcoming french book on arts and sciences at the Staufien court.

⁵⁷ *Salimbene de Adam*. Chronica. MGH SS. Bd. 32. Hannover, Leipzig, 1905-1912. S. 351. Cf. : « Fridericus et sapientes crediderunt, quod non esset alia vita nisi presens, ut liberius carnalitatibus suis et miseris vacare possent. Ideo fuerunt Epicuri, quibus convenit quod ait Iacobus V: *Epulati estis super terram et in luxuriis enutristis corda vestra* ». Ibid. S. 349. In a similar way, Jacob of Vitry was indignant at the curiosity of seeing the marvels of the East as the only one reason that led the crusaders to the Holy land : « Multa enim in partibus illis mirabiliter operatus est Dominus, que sicut iusti et bene affecti et prudentes homines ad laudem Dei conuertunt et gloriam; quemadmodum beatus Brandanus longo tempore per maria nauigauit, ut uideret mirabilia Dei in profundo, ita leues et curiosi homines ad uanitatem retorquent, que Dominus in argumentum potentie sue et materiam laudis dignatus est operari ». (Historia orientalis, I, 83). Quoted in : *Gauthier Dalché P*. Les savoirs géographiques en

and his persecution of the Church and of Franciscans), as was Dante, who, for the same reason, condemned him to *his* Hell, but praised him in his *De vulgari eloquentia*.

This visible inconsistency of two famous historians of their much turbulent century deserve to close our short story. The real history of curiosity in the Middle Ages is still to be written. But even an overview of several, discordant and concordant, opinions shows that we can't call someone who did not notice a lake « uncurious »: it would be as anachronistic as calling Frederick II « the first european » (Nitzsche) or Dante's Ulysses a precursor of Columbus. They all participated in an unfinished discussion.

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